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Chapter 18

Teachers as Leaders? Finnish Student Teachers' Perceptions of Participation in Leadership in School



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Abstract School teachers' work is increasingly associated with leadership. Teacher autonomy is exceptionally high in Finland, and newly qualified teachers are expected to take responsibility for and participate in leadership processes, both inside their classrooms and schoolwide. To develop these abilities, student teachers should recognise the leadership dimensions of their profession to be active agents: their opportunities to participate in and influence the development of pedagogical solutions and the operation of the school. This study explores how student teachers perceive their participation and agency in leadership in their future work. The data consist of student teachers' ($N = 68$) empathy-based written stories describing either the promising future of a teacher or a future in which things went poorly. The data were analysed using a narrative approach. The results show that student teachers perceive leadership to be composed of individual professional skills and external factors that enable them to be active, such as opportunities provided by the principal and the general school culture.

Keywords Student teachers · Teacher leadership · Participation · Agency · Teacher education

Introduction

In Finland, school teaching is viewed as a demanding and expert profession, with leadership connected to the work of a teacher in many ways; in practice, teachers are central agents in school development, curriculum design, and other leadership functions. Finnish teachers are expected to participate broadly and be proactive in their schools (Toom & Husu, 2016). However, initial Finnish teacher education has

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not explicitly included any studies on leadership, whether in general or regarding qualifying as a principal. Thus, the Teacher Education Forum, established in 2016 by the Finnish Ministry of Culture and Education to improve teacher education, encourages teacher educators to develop the capacity of student teachers to take responsibility for and participate in school leadership processes. To support the development of teachers' professional and leadership identity and to develop their skills, student teachers should recognise the leadership dimensions of their profession.

In this study, we investigated student teachers' views on leadership as an aspect of their future profession as teachers. We examined how student teachers perceived their own opportunities to act regarding leadership in the future, what factors support and prevent participation, and what kind of leadership agency the students' perceptions reflect. In order to discover the perceptions of student teachers, we used a narrative methodology and explored the perceptions of student teachers through empathy-based written stories (Eskola, 1991). Through narratives, we aimed to examine student teachers' ideas about teacher leadership as a part of their future profession.

The Concept of Teacher Leadership

Teacher leadership has been of increasing scholarly interest since the 1980s (Nguyen et al., 2019; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). While the concept is now well established, it does not have a single definition. According to Nguyen et al.'s (2019) literature review covering 2003 through 2017, teacher leadership has been associated with both peer collaboration and informal interactions. It has been reported to have an impact on improving instructional practices, school effectiveness, and student learning, among other outcomes (Nguyen et al., 2019). Most definitions of teacher leadership include the idea of the 'role of an influencer rather than a role or formal authority' and of teachers being influential both inside and outside the classroom. This definition characterises teacher leadership in the Finnish school context as we understand it; although formal positions are rare, elements of leadership are included in teachers' work, as teachers have significant autonomy and are accorded expert status in schools. They participate in school development and leadership processes in many ways. For instance, teachers engage in pedagogical curricular processes and various internal school workgroups (Metsäpelto et al., 2021). Through these activities, teachers serve as central agents in school development, strategy work, and other leadership functions (Ahtiainen et al., 2019). In addition, teacher leadership can also be viewed as an informal influence on school leadership. This can be driven, for example, by professional hierarchies between teachers or otherwise established power relations inside the school community. As such, teacher leadership can be defined as informal leadership (Hunzicker, 2013) and related to the work of every teacher, not just formal leadership roles. Hence, when teacher leadership is approached as the readiness and ability to participate and influence, it can be understood as part of the teacher's profession.

Beijaard et al. (2004) defined the teacher's professional identity as a dynamic and ongoing process of interpretation and reinterpretation. While an essential part of teachers' work is influenced by their professional identity (Rodgers & Scott, 2008), it is equally important to examine the evolving teacher identity, especially from the perspective of novice teachers. Personal experiences influence each teacher's identity construction: memories of different teachers, being a student, and the perceptions of a good teacher (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Chang-Kredl & Kingsley, 2014; Izadinia, 2013; Körkkö et al., 2016). Teacher identity is also constructed and negotiated in the sociocultural contexts of the community in which teachers participate (Eteläpelto & Vähäsantanen, 2008). In addition, during the teacher identity process, a teacher's professional agency is formed (Buchanan, 2015). Toom et al. (2015, p. 2) define teacher agency as '... teachers' active efforts to make choices and intentional action in a way that makes a significant difference'. In this research, agency is understood, as Ahearn (2001, p. 112) defined it, as the 'socioculturally mediated capacity to act'. To be more specific, those acts happen in and are constrained and resourced by certain historically formed sociocultural circumstances (Eteläpelto et al., 2013).

Teacher identity and its development are also crucial for developing teachers' leadership identity (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). Sinha and Hanuscin (2017) pointed out that developing a teacher's leadership identity is a complex, unique process that depends on the specific teacher's life experiences, priorities, and school context. In addition, the development of a teacher's leadership identity is influenced by personal, organisational, and societal factors (Liu et al., 2021). Research has also revealed that school culture plays a role in teachers' readiness for leadership (Oppi et al., 2022). As we emphasise informal leadership in our definition, leadership socialisation is viewed as a process in which the early-career teacher becomes active and influential in developing his or her school. Previous studies on leadership socialisation in school have mainly focused on teachers becoming principals. However, theories and studies regarding the teaching career, such as the identity development studies cited above, explain how teachers acquire different leadership positions and develop a variety of professional orientations in their organisations during their service to the profession.

Teacher Leadership in the Finnish Comprehensive School Context

In the Finnish education system, leadership has not been traditionally perceived as related to teacher's work (Rokka, 2011). In Finnish educational settings, teacher leadership has mainly been studied in early childhood education and care (e.g. Heikka et al., 2018). In a comprehensive school context, instead of using a teacher leadership concept, a teacher's position and competency have been approached from the perspective of teachers' autonomy, pedagogical freedom, and managing their work (Mikkola & Välijärvi, 2015; Tirri, 2010). Supporting this, Finnish teachers have reported strong professional agency regarding their own teaching and

its development; however, they experience less professional agency working with colleagues than with own students (Soini et al., 2020). In classrooms, teachers are pedagogical leaders because they are responsible for planning and organising teaching activities. Teachers have broad autonomy and, with that, come requirements for high professional ethics and professional development throughout their teaching careers. From a school leadership perspective, teachers play a central role in implementing curricula and policies in practice, but it has not been emphasised from a leadership perspective.

However, the perception of leadership has changed in recent decades. The principal has become more of a general manager of the school who manages finances and personnel and is responsible for results (Alava et al., 2012; Aho et al., 2006). As Aho et al. (2006, p. 166) described: 'Previously, a school principal was an experienced senior teacher who was promoted for good service to education. Today's school principal must be a qualified leader who understands education development and has solid management skills to lead a school'. As principals' administrative workload has increased, the idea of more collaborative leadership has become increasingly important. Today, school leadership is referred to as distributed leadership in which teachers are involved in formal and informal leadership processes (Lahtero et al., 2017; Ahtiainen et al., 2019). Teacher leadership has been seen as a form of distributed leadership, or part of it (Harris, 2003; see also Heikka et al., 2018). It is, thus, crucial to understand how future teachers perceive their possible leadership roles under the current circumstances.

Although teacher leadership is not a traditionally used concept in Finnish teacher research, some examples can be found. Recently, this was included in the model of teacher competence in the Finnish teacher research developed by Finnish universities providing university-based initial teacher education (Metsäpelto et al., 2021). This multidimensional adapted process (MAP) model aims to describe the key knowledge and skills needed for teaching. In the MAP model, the teacher's professional development is seen as a continuum from the student selection stage through education to the working life. In addition to the traditional area of teaching in a classroom, the model considers the teacher's agency outside the classroom, including engagement in the school's pedagogical development and teacher leadership, as part of professional competence (Metsäpelto et al., 2021). Next, we describe the implementation and methods of the research.

Methods

The present study investigated student teachers' views on leadership as an aspect of their future profession as teachers. In this study, we were interested in the informal elements of teacher leadership and in student teachers' perceptions of their possibilities to reshape work in school, show initiative, and become agents in their

professional work. Student teachers can provide valuable information from the perspective of leadership socialisation. Teacher education could evolve as an educational entity from the traditional teacher to a pedagogical leader, in addition to being on the continuum towards formal principal qualification.

The research question of the study is as follows:

How do student teachers perceive the factors that prevent or enhance participation and agency in leadership in the school context?

Data Collection Through Empathy-Based Stories

The data were collected in the Moodle e-learning environment during a November 2021 online course that was part of initial teacher education for elementary teachers at a Finnish university. Students were informed about the methods and purpose of the research; their participation was voluntary, and participants could refuse initially or withdraw at any time (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK, 2019).

The data were gathered using empathy-based stories (Eskola, 1991, 1997). This method was chosen since we did not want to limit the data solely to students' personal experiences but desired to include respondents' perceptions and knowledge. Moreover, this method is considered appropriate for a topic that has not been extensively studied. The students who attended the course were tasked with writing two stories based on parallel frames: one describing a future in which things went poorly and the other the promising future of a teacher. Students were asked to write freely and empathise with both imagined futures. The frame stories were as follows:

Negative scenario

It is the year 2035. You have been a teacher for about 10 years. You feel that your school has not developed as desired. You feel that you and your colleagues have not had the opportunity to influence the course of things in the school community. Tell your story, describing the situation from the perspectives of you and your work community, along with your own skills and professional development.

Positive scenario

It is the year 2035. You have been a teacher for about 10 years. The educational institution where you have worked has progressed; students' learning outcomes have improved, and your school community and students are better off. This is primarily thanks to you and your colleagues. Tell your story, describing the situation from the perspectives of you and your work community, along with your own skills and professional development.

After writing the narratives, students were asked to bring the texts to the discussion area of the Moodle e-learning environment where they were discussed freely in groups of three to five students; for example, a group might have focused on a central theme that emerged from the stories. The narratives were used as the research material, with 98 student teachers (who formed 28 groups) writing and discussing the parallel stories and thus leading to 196 items of text.

Narrative Approach in the Analysis

Using a narrative research approach, the data were examined for factors that build teacher leadership (Karjalainen & Puroila, 2017). In this study, 'narrative' refers to the data themselves, the analysis of those data, and how the subjects structured their views and experiences. People use narratives to express personal meanings, build an identity, and structure their views on diverse experiences. By choosing this approach, we situated ourselves as researchers within a constructivist epistemology in which people construct their knowledge and identity through narratives (Heikkinen, 2010). Knowledge was attained by analysing the student teachers' understanding of teacher leadership, its construction, and the factors that prevent and support its growth. The factors contributing to and preventing the phenomenon are at the heart of the analysis, as opposed to the narrative structures of the data. In the career descriptions produced using the empathy-based stories method, the narrator acts as the story's subject and, thus, determines what is and is not omitted (cf. Burgos, 1988). The narratives were examined based on both pragmatic reasoning and narrative analysis, aiming to identify an interpretative story about the relationships and meanings of events (Polkinghorne, 1988).

The first author performed the analysis of the data utilising the QSR NVivo software package. Qualitative content analysis was used to examine and craft stories describing the most typical meanings in the student teachers' narratives and their connections. The factors that prevented participation and agency were interpreted based on negative stories and those that supported participation and agency in the light of positive stories. The analysis of narratives was carried out by thematising and typifying the data. The analysis began by reading the narratives and marking relevant points from the perspectives of teacher leadership, participation, and agency. Data saturation was reached after reviewing about three quarters of the data. A random sample of the remaining 20 participants was undertaken to ensure saturation; no new themes emerged.

After the thematic analysis (Cohen et al., 2011), a narrative analysis was carried out to construct a new story according to the themes and citations found in the student teachers' narratives. The aim was to synthesise data through narrative knowledge. First, themes were extracted from the material, after which core stories were built on those extracts. The two constructed stories resulting from the narrative analysis are based on the interpretation of the data; as such, they should not be viewed as the informants' narratives. The new core stories were constructed thematically following the typical chronological order in the original stories (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Results

In the following sections, we present the findings of this research. First, we provide the results of the thematic analysis, that is, the analysis of the narratives; second, the two core stories are presented as the results of the narrative analysis. The primary

Table 18.1 Themes arise from participants' frame stories

Negative stories	
Principals' negative leadership style	Authoritarian leadership in which the teacher has no opportunity to exert influence Principals' inappropriate behaviour
Negative atmosphere	Bad school atmosphere means exhaustion and cynicism Bad school atmosphere leads to negative attitudes towards joint development
High workload	Chaotic operating culture Workload caused by excessive demands from outside Limited school resources
Teachers' own actions	Overly high self-set standards Conscious decision not to participate in leadership
Positive stories	
Principals' positive leadership style	Principals as enablers of teacher leadership Principals as central figures in change
Positive atmosphere	Emotional atmosphere as a resource Systematic culture of working together Enthusiastic and innovative atmosphere
Appropriate workload	Well-functioning routines Ample resources
Teachers' own actions	Teachers' personal reflection and responsibility Teachers' participation in continuing education

and subsidiary themes resulting from the analysis appear in Table 18.1. As an answer to the research question on the factors preventing and enhancing participation and agency, the themes of both negative and positive frame stories are presented in detail in the sections below, with clarifying quotations from the data.

Themes in the Negative and Positive Stories

Teacher Students' Views in Negative Stories

Principal's Negative Leadership Style: Authoritarian Leadership in Which the Teacher Has No Opportunity to Influence

In their stories, the student teachers described how the school had not developed because either the principal or an external authority determined its activities. Teachers had no say in school operations, and there was no interest in their views. Authoritarian leadership may have been personified in the principal, but the stories often described how the school itself was subject to authoritarian leadership because its development was directed from outside its walls. In Finland, the debate over the reform of the fundamentals of the latest comprehensive school curriculum has often

concerned moving too quickly and overriding teachers' views (Niemi, 2021). Authoritarian leadership was almost invariably combined with problems of school development; teachers had no room for agency or even participation in an authoritarian culture. Authoritarian leadership was also often arbitrary and focused on irrelevant issues that weakened the feeling of communality and motivation to participate. In the stories, the school also suffered under authoritarian leadership in other ways; they often related how authoritarian leadership led to a chaotic operating culture that burdened teachers and caused problems for pupils:

I work at a school where neither teachers nor students have a chance to influence school business. The principal or the municipality decides everything. When I graduated as a classroom teacher, I had big dreams of using my teaching methods and everything I had learned during my studies in my own class, but all these dreams have crumbled.

Principals' Negative Leadership Style: Inappropriate Behaviour

In the student teachers' stories, the principal could also act inappropriately, poisoning the atmosphere in the school community and weakening the motivation of staff to participate in school leadership. Inappropriate actions were most commonly manifested in the stories as teachers experiencing a lack of appreciation, an underperforming principal view of the principal, and a preference for some teachers over others:

We do not feel supported, we do not feel appreciated: just harsh criticism from all directions. Rumours are also circulating that one teacher's move to an even more unfortunate school was due to criticism from the principal, so the threshold for turning to anyone is really high.

Negative Atmosphere in School: Exhaustion and Cynicism

The stories attributed difficulties with the school's progress and the development of teacher leadership to problems with the school atmosphere, which was often described using stress-related concepts such as exhaustion and cynicism. Student teachers depicted this environment as limiting their agency and participation in leadership activities, even though no explicit, formal obstacles stood in their way. As a result, there was no willingness to participate in development processes or to consider how to improve the school. This view can be understood through stress literature, as high stress and weak individual- and group-level coping can lead to diminished participation in and commitment to the teaching profession. For example, stress has been linked to young teachers' early turnover (Räsänen et al., 2020). In addition, teacher stress has been prominent in public discussions in Finland. A time perspective of the stories revealed how the atmosphere was viewed as having a substantial impact on teacher leadership socialisation; often, the stories described how young teachers quickly grew disappointed after coming to a new school, only to find that innovative ideas were not received as anticipated and that

opportunities and support for the development of their own teaching were not offered:

At the beginning of my career as a teacher, I was full of new ideas and enthusiasm ... For years, however, the atmosphere in our work community has been a bit uninspired and tired ... the lack of communality has been surprisingly burdensome and has led to the experience of our not being willing or able to influence our work and its development.

This is not what I expected when I was in college. I have not been able to push through any reforms in our school. If I ever suggest anything, it will get a negative response: 'No, we don't want to do that; it would increase workload'.

Negative Atmosphere in the School: Negative Attitude Towards Joint Development

The scant opportunities for participation and agency in leadership activities were explained not only by cynicism and exhaustion but also by a generally negative atmosphere regarding development. This negative attitude can be understood not only as resistance to change but also from the perspective of the teaching profession's role as an agent of socialisation and transmitter of culture. The school community as a whole and the individual teachers wanted to stick to old routines and restrict new teachers' agency when they expressed the need for change:

There are always those who oppose things and want to continue with that same old formula. I feel bad for the students when their friends from other schools tell them about the great projects and assignments they have been allowed to do at school.

Instead of including us [new teachers] in school development, we were taught the ways of the house and to avoid extra work ... The work community had a bad spirit between employees, and it seemed that there was no hope to do things better.

High Workload: Chaotic Operating Culture

Teacher leadership was also hindered by a disorganised and even chaotic operating culture that manifested itself in the school's everyday life and in challenges related to teachers' work. In the stories, teachers felt that their work was too fragmented and that they had to do significant extra work that did not serve their profession's core purpose: the students' learning and well-being that teachers usually emphasised as a point of reference. Again, the descriptions highlighted factors typical of the 2010s and related to changes in Finland's funding model, which led to cuts in basic allocations and more projects and reforms that did not always come from schools or were not wanted by schools. The projects in the negative stories were described as additions to everyday work, not as opportunities to grow:

At the beginning of my career, I would have liked to focus on the basics of work, school life and students, but the very first autumn I felt overwhelmed from the outside by projects that were not wanted by or conceived within the school, but by external parties.

After chaotic school days, no one has the will or the energy for development or spending time together.

For 10 years, it has been change after change. During my studies, it felt like so many things should be mastered as a teacher and there was an infinite amount of work to be done ... New projects are constantly coming in that are to be taken on, along with all other work.

High Workload: Excessive External Demands

The teachers described high workload and poor resources as leading to situations where teachers could not improve themselves or participate in community development. The workload was often described as ‘extra’ projects and other work. Teachers often contrasted these demands to the teacher’s ‘basic work’; in the stories, the teachers clearly stated that they did not have the time to meet with pupils and parents because of the extra work. As a result, the pupils were not doing well, the problems piled up, and a negative spiral ensued. In the end, teachers were unable to display interest in developing their community. This can again be seen as reflecting student teachers’ general knowledge about the current demands of the profession that have been increasing over the last decade (e.g. Kauppi et al., 2022). The stories also included frequent references to the theme of socialisation in teacher leadership, with new teachers often described as coming to school eager and idea-rich, only to have 10 years of hardwork force them to withdraw from their work community and its growth.

Huh! How hard it’s been at work again. The constant disagreements and unnecessary meetings day after day are exhausting. I don’t have time for anything when I feel like the responsibilities and work are piling up, little by little, on my shoulders on every issue ... it’s better to be quiet (in meetings) and try to handle your own class as well as possible. I don’t have the resources to build a school community on my own:

Especially recently, I have had to work from home in the evenings so that I could meet each student, even for a brief while, during the day.

High Workload: Poor School Resources

In their negative stories, student teachers often referred to scant resources hindering the development of the school. Teacher leadership is impeded when it is difficult and burdensome to do basic work because the necessary tools are lacking. For example, equipment might be broken or otherwise unusable in sports classes, or crucial information and communications technology assets might be malfunctioning or absent. In addition to material resources, the authors described gaps in crucial human resources; there were no instructor resources or special needs teacher supports available for symptomatic pupils or those who needed a little extra help. Therefore, teachers’ individual and collective willingness to develop was described as weak:

The way our school works is very old-fashioned in many respects, but I can’t be solely responsible for changes ... Even though all the teachers who work here are uninspired and fed up with how things are, no one wants to do anything about it anymore ... I find myself

dreaming all the time, for example, that I take my students to the gym for a change, but a bus needs to be arranged because our old small school does not have its own hall ... Insufficient resources are irritating in many other things as well, but I find it easiest to do as I always do.

Teachers' Own Actions: Overly High Self-Set Standards

Following classical stress theories of stress as appraisal, the student teachers described how they had set high expectations for developing their competencies during their university studies but could not meet them once they began working, due to the challenges of coping and a high workload. The work community did not support them in their objectives, leading to frustration and exhaustion. The teachers described how they wanted to grow but felt abandoned:

Even during my studies, it felt like so many things had to be mastered as a teacher and there would be an infinite amount of work to do ... I don't have enough resources for everything.

Teachers' Own Actions: A Conscious Decision to Not Participate in Leadership

Most of the negative narratives had a turn in which teachers made a conscious decision to retreat from all activities in the school except those involving their own classes and their own students. Even if there was not a decision as such, the student teachers at least stated that they were not interested in participating. Narratives usually described a build-up to the turning point, with the protagonist becoming passive, which could be caused by one or more of the factors described above. This passivity was usually expressed as an unwillingness to take part in the school community, descriptions of waiting for vacation to arrive, planning to change schools, or even quit being a teacher:

I don't even dare ask for help or advice because everyone is so tired and stressed. I had ample enthusiasm for my work, but it's been eroding, and I'm considering leaving the profession. At the moment, I'm just trying to get through the days, and I'm constantly counting down the days to the next holiday. The work itself gives me nothing, and I can say the same thing about the work community.

Teacher Students' Views in Positive Stories

Principal's Positive Leadership Style: The Principal as an Enabler of Teacher Leadership

The principal's actions in successful teacher leadership were described in positive terms, such as being easy to follow, implementing precise and predictable practices, ensuring good interaction, and trusting and supporting subordinates. The important elements of leadership were to support the staff and create a solid framework for

joint action. The personal traits of the principal were not generally explicitly described, and she was rarely depicted as heroic or as the critical factor in the positive evolution of the school. More often, the principal's input could be found by reading between the lines. Teachers see the principal's actions as significant for positive change, but the principal's role is viewed primarily as an enabler of experts' (i.e. teachers') work:

The school's principal played an important role [in positive development]: Supporting subordinates, disseminating information at all levels and soliciting and responding to feedback made it possible to implement changes.

Principal's Positive Leadership Style: The Principal as a Central Figure in the Progress of the School

Although most positive narratives described the principal's role as an enabler of teacher leadership, some narratives emphasised the principal's role, qualities, and competencies. In these narratives, the principal's interactions were perceived as positive, and her actions were described as in line with the distributed leadership style, since she involved teachers in decision-making:

Our principal is also a rare gem; she put the changes in place, involved the entire school in the decision-making process, and, through her example, represented the school's position. She set out the principles of eco-social justice in our school: Even in freezing temperatures of -30 degrees, this hero cycled to school.

Positive Atmosphere: Enthusiastic and Innovative Atmosphere

Enthusiasm and an innovative atmosphere were terms that illustrated everyday life in schools where teacher leadership was strong. In these accounts, the teachers' descriptions did not describe many of the leaders' actions; the principal or other management figures did not define the structures of their operations or the operating culture. The stories followed many of the ideas of the innovative school model described by Lavonen et al. (2014). By contrast, teachers' individual and community agency and inclusion were at the centre of these stories that described what the teachers did and how they acted; the role of the principal and other managerial personnel in these accounts was minimal. The socialisation of teacher leadership got off to a good start in the stories when teachers were well received in the new work community and were quickly afforded ample opportunities to act and express their ideas. Interaction with senior teachers was open and reciprocal:

Everything is based on our open and continuously learning work community, where everyone's strengths are used in a meaningful way. This practice of doing things together is reflected from the teacher's room to the operating culture of our school at all levels.

Instead of teaching us enthusiastic young teachers about the ways of the house, we were given a chance to develop the work community. The community emphasised openness and responsibility ... Things went smoothly, so all the difficulties were also easy to bring up in

the community. Moreover, there was energy left over to participate in teaching development activities and take responsibility for teaching-related positions of trust. This resulted in several projects for the school that increased its resources.

Positive Atmosphere: Systematic Culture of Working Together

Several positive stories highlighted systematicity and consciousness of goals in the joint development of the school community. Teachers defined the needs and concrete goals of school development and made plans to achieve those goals. These descriptions emphasised the features of distributed leadership, in which an organisation's human resources are maximised by empowering individuals and allowing them to take leadership positions in their individual areas of expertise (Ahtiainen et al., 2019). Although formal positions were not mentioned in these stories, they still revealed that strong empowerment, agency, and participation were indicators of genuine distributed leadership; the student teachers described in detail the measures they took as a community while working towards that goal. For example, systematic data collection with questionnaires and a type of action research were employed, as were workshops that openly sought development targets and ideas for new ways of working:

We carried out empirical research on school well-being: we conducted interviews and surveys at our school on elements of well-being, taking into account the implementation of others' (e.g. Finnish UNICEF) research results on these themes. One of the most significant elements of school well-being is the sense of inclusion, which we set out together to strengthen by having the students use situational mapping within the framework of the Basic Education Act. Our school's premises and operating culture gradually began to look the way we wanted.

Our school introduced workshop-style cooperation meetings to jointly solve different challenges. The challenges related to current issues; sometimes we worked on student-oriented pedagogical methods and sometimes on matters related to well-being at work. Based on the challenges, we were able to come up with new ideas.

Positive Atmosphere: Emotional Atmosphere as Resource

In addition to an innovative atmosphere, the stories often discussed the emotional atmosphere as an important factor in teachers' ability and inclusion. Teachers felt welcome in the work community as soon as they arrived. Their stories recounted that, later on, they formed meaningful relationships in the work community. The emotional atmosphere was described as making it appealing for the teacher to come to work and where collaborations went smoothly. For teacher leadership, this was significant because it seemed that a positive emotional climate led to dedication to the community and an experience of vigour among the protagonists and the other school staff. On a theoretical level, this can be understood mainly from the perspective of work engagement (Hakanen et al., 2006), as terms like vigour, dedication, joy of work, and commitment were used in the stories. The positive mood provided energy that helped people work towards a common goal:

My co-workers are a great bunch ... Our cooperation works very well, and you never have to feel alone in facing a problem at work. There's a big blue sign on the staff room door that says 'stress-free zone'. I walk in, smell the freshly brewed coffee and I hear someone talking cheerfully. They wish me good morning while sitting on the couch next.

Appropriate Workload: Well-Functioning Routines

Like appropriate material and human resources, teachers described good routines as enabling the development of their own and joint work. These routines created predictability and controllability. Above all, they freed up energy for work outside the teacher's basic duties to participate in school development:

We have our routines and essential things in order, so we have the opportunity to be agile and participate in unexpected experiments. We have resources ... for development because the foundations are solid.

Teachers' Own Actions: Teacher's Personal Reflection, Responsibility, and Participation in Continuous Education

Teachers often described the drivers of development in both positive and negative stories, especially from an environmental point of view; in the negative stories, environmental factors hindered inclusion in and agency for leadership activities. In the positive accounts, those factors promoted inclusion and agency. However, in some stories, teachers also highlighted their growth and reflection as significant in teacher leadership development. The student teacher in the excerpt below cited it as the most crucial factor. Although environmental factors play a significant role, the teacher's desire for development, reflection, and attitude serves as the most critical resource:

The most important thing [in positive change] has been my motivation for change and keeping a positive attitude despite the challenges—attitudes break structures. Closer cooperation between home, pupils and other school actors and researching and studying has given me perspectives for reflecting on my teaching.

We have had opportunities for continuing education that have helped us in our professional development. A while ago, we were in training on new technological tools and the use of versatile teaching facilities and now we are no longer just teaching on school premises, but have developed teaching in other learning environments to offer students diverse learning experiences.

The Two Core Stories of Teacher Leadership

After completing our thematic analysis of the student teachers' texts, a narrative analysis was conducted (Polkinghorne, 1995). Ultimately, it was possible to gain a nuanced understanding of how the students' narratives were constructed, their

commonalities, and where they diverged. Through encapsulating these nuances, two core stories were formed.

Unsuccessful Teacher Leadership Story

At the beginning of my career as a teacher, I was full of new ideas and enthusiasm. Instead of including us (new teachers) in school development, we were taught the ways of the house and to avoid extra work. The atmosphere in our work community has been uninspired and stale. I have not been able to push through any reforms in our school. If I ever suggest anything, there are always those who oppose things and want to continue with that same old formula: 'No, we don't want to do it, it will increase workload'. And yes, the workload is very high, since we have to live with scarce resources in terms of both staff and materials. It is also partly due to the chaotic operating culture, where I feel that we are always pushed from the outside by projects that we did not want or think up ourselves. Basically, we do not have a say in where our school should go and how. The principal does not listen to us either, and it seems that teachers have no room for agency and participation in the authoritarian culture that the principal has created and sustains. A lack of appreciation from the leadership towards some of us is also apparent in the school's everyday life. That weakens team spirit and our experience of communality. The only reason I am still working as a teacher is the students. I am concentrating solely on my classes and pupils and no longer have any desire to participate in the development of the school. I had high expectations for myself and the school; now, I feel that I have let myself down.

Successful Teacher Leadership Story

Instead of teaching us enthusiastic young teachers about the ways of the house, we were given a warm welcome and a chance to help develop the work community. Here, everything is based on our open and continuously learning work community, where everyone's strengths are used in a meaningful way. Any difficulties are easy to bring up in the community in an accepting atmosphere, and we cope with stress very well. Because of good routines and structure, we all have energy to participate in teaching development activities and take responsibility for teaching-related positions of trust. This has led to several projects for the school, increased the school's resources and facilitated the ongoing growth of the school. This is why we have managed to keep the workload appropriate over the years. We also have a systematic culture of joint development where we, as a work community, define needs, goals and strategies for development in workshops and where we monitor the changes together using a variety of data collection and analysis tools. This does not increase our workload because it is all well-structured and planned by the principal and other leadership figures.

Conclusions and Discussion

This study aimed to examine student teachers' views on leadership as an aspect of their future profession as teachers. We approached teacher leadership as informal leadership that is realised as teachers' participation and active agency in school development and leadership processes. The results of our study show that student

teachers see teacher leadership as a natural part of their professional identity, subject to certain prerequisites. When school culture is supportive, demands and resources are balanced and teachers are allowed to strive for a commonly defined goal, and they become dynamic agents and participate in school development and leadership. Successful leadership socialisation depends, to a great extent, on these factors. Student teachers seldom question their participation and role in teacher leadership for other than environmental factors. The student teachers' stories about factors preventing leadership were firmly based on key issues in the Finnish school debate. Stress, workload, a fragmented job description, high standards, and the resulting individual- and community-level exhaustion are real challenges for schools and threats to young teachers.

In general, the leadership concepts found in the student teachers' stories and distributed leadership were preferred. This is in line with the current idea of school leadership as a distributed process in which both the school principal and the teachers take part (Lahtero et al., 2017; Ahtiainen et al., 2019). Student teachers preferred a low-hierarchy organisation at school, an approach that is antithetical to authoritarian leadership. In addition, recent research (Oppi et al., 2022) has indicated that innovative and change-oriented school culture and the possibility of distributed leadership support teachers' readiness for leadership. Our research results support that shared expertise and distributed leadership are essential for teacher participation and agency.

Current discussions on the possibilities for the broader involvement of teachers in school leadership activities and pilots of teachers' working time reform in Finland that aim at distributed leadership and management arrangements (Hautamäki, 2015) demonstrate the strong need to bolster teacher leadership. In the student teachers' stories, instead of describing formal positions and a clearly delimited job description, leadership appeared as a natural and self-organising element based on teacher autonomy and expertise. Student teachers perceived teacher leadership as a natural and, ideally, inspiring part of their future work. However, the negative stories show that some student teachers see their students and class teaching activities as a priority in their work. They may have chosen the teaching profession because teachers have traditionally worked alone, which is why these narratives showed community-level duties as a burden on classroom work and building relationships with the pupils. These features in the negative stories correspond with the perceptions of Soini et al. (2020) on Finnish teachers' experiences on professional agency emphasising their own teaching and classroom.

The descriptions of work in schools that appear in the students' narratives correspond to the current picture of the teaching profession as interpersonal and knowledge-intensive expert work in changing circumstances (Toom, 2017). Based on the student teachers' narratives, teacher leadership is an intrinsic part of the teacher's professional practices (Metsäpelto et al., 2021). As stated earlier, teachers are expected to participate in school leadership collaborative processes in many ways. Therefore, in the future, it is essential to treat educational leadership as a collective endeavour and emphasise the importance of structures that enable teachers to

participate in the development of schools, both in initial teacher education leadership studies and in studies that lead to qualification as a principal.

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